Gateway Drama Department heads *Into the Woods*

**Huntington** - Gateway's last musical, *Once Upon A Mattress*, was performed over 10 years ago. A decade later, Gateway picks up that fairy tale theme as another musical takes the stage: Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*. The musical, which originated on Broadway in 1986 under the direction of James Lapine, was made into a movie in 2014 starring James Corden and Emily Blunt.

The show twists together four Grimm fairy tales: Cinderella, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, and Jack and the Beanstalk, all wrapped around a character called the Baker. He and his wife must interact with characters from each of these stories to break a curse placed on them, in order to have a baby.

*Into the Woods* will be performed on March 17 (starting at 6:30 p.m.) & 18 (starting at 6 p.m.) in the Performing Arts Center at Gateway Regional High School. Tickets are $10 for adults and $7 for students and seniors.

“Taking on this show is an incredible feat for Gateway,” reported cast member Dawson Atkin. “Last year, the group performed The Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare, and this show blows that away in terms of difficulty. Sondheim is well known in the theatre community for being incredibly difficult, and many high schools wouldn’t dare to take it on.”

The show features a number of acting debuts, but most important is the male lead, Robert Austin, who plays The Baker. “The best way to learn how to swim is to jump in headfirst,” Austin said about his experience. When asked if he planned on participating in future plays, he answered with a resounding “Yes!”

Musicals are sometimes stereotyped as being just big happy songs with jazz hands at the end. They are seen as merely fluff with no real depth. *Into the Woods* isn’t like that at all. As is typical of Sondheim, the show tackles serious themes, including morality, loss, what we are really willing to do to achieve our wishes...and the price that can come with. The show is different from other musicals because it is extremely emotional. This means that all involved must not only be great singers, they must be able to act with great attention to detail so that the show’s messages carry through to the audience.

Director Keith Boylan was the one who ultimately decided to make the jump to a musical. When asked why he made the decision, he said, “I just felt like we had a critical mass of talent.” He said it was clear that the students were interested in a musical, so he decided to do what the students felt they wanted.

There are truly no small parts in *Into the Woods*. Nearly every character has solo singing at some point, and some actors play multiple characters; for example Kilee Holmes plays no fewer than four parts throughout the show, including The Giant. Each actor pulls an incredible amount of weight in the show, and each one has worked diligently to learn their parts to perfection.

Stephen Sondheim is well known for his use of intricate melodies and overlapping phrases. Music Director Jerilyn Beauregard (Choir Director for the school) has been working tirelessly with the students to help them learn their musical parts, which are far from simple. The cast has worked through countless vocal rehearsals to ensure that each note is perfectly performed.
Into the Woods stars Robert Austin as The Baker, Charlotte Kazalski as The Baker’s Wife, Margaret Rock as The Witch, Rachel LeBarron as Cinderella, Maria Pless as Little Red Riding Hood, and Dawson Atkin as Jack. These principal actors do an amazing job, and the actors around them do equally well. Each member of the cast does their part far beyond what could be expected from a group of teenagers.

This production is a fast-paced adventure with twists and turns around every corner. It’s impossible to know what will happen next. Into the Woods is a tale full of wolves, spells, beans, giants, princes, witches, and even more. Each note and line is delivered to its full extent. Who knows when Gateway will perform a musical again? It’s best not to risk missing one while it’s happening!

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Photo: Robert Austin (the Baker) and Charlotte Kazalski (the Baker’s Wife) rehearse a scene from Into The Woods, which will be performed at Gateway High School on March 17 and 18. Curtain rises at 6 p.m.